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AUTHOR Fagenson, Ellen A.
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ABSTRACT

Both person-centered and situation-centered hypotheses have been posited to explain women's limited rise to top corporate positions. To test these hypotheses, 260 employed corporate women completed a questionnaire assessing their orientations to their careers, organizations, jobs, power, performance, and subordinates. Questions concerning women's work environments were also included. An analysis of the results showed that high level corporate women had significantly more organizational commitment and power than middle level women who were, in turn, significantly more powerful and committed than low level women. Low level women had greater power aspirations than middle level women who, in turn, had a greater desire to increase their power than high level corporate women. High and middle level women indicated significantly greater job satisfaction, sharing of responsibilities, organizational concern for career growth, inclusion in informal power networks, and more concern for job demands than personal life. Middle and low level women perceived that behaving like a man is significantly more helpful to getting ahead than did high level women. The majority of women attributed their performance to their skills and abilities and identified the type of work they were doing as the most important aspect of their jobs. These results support the situation-centered perspective. (BL)

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Women's Work Orientations:

The Right Stuff?

Ellen A. Fagenson, Ph.D.
School of Management
Suny Binghamton
Binghamton, NY 13901
(607) 798-6861
(607) 548-9551 (home)

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Women's Work Orientations: The Right Stuff?

Abstract

Two explanations for women's limited presence in top corporate positions were tested. The person-centered explanation argues that women's organizational behavior is contrary to the demands of top corporate positions. The situation-centered perspective suggests that women's behavior varies with respect to hierarchical level: the higher the position, the more "top management" focused the orientation. Women's orientations towards their careers, organizations, jobs, power, performance, and subordinates were examined with respect to organizational level. Questions concerning women's work environments were also included. The results provided some support for the situation perspective. Person-centered predictions were not supported.

Women's Work Orientations: The Right Stuff?

Problem

Basically two explanations have been posited to explain women's limited rise to top corporate positions. Person-centered theorists argue that women's work orientations are inappropriate for high level positions (see Riger & Galligan, 1980, for a review). In contrast, situation-centered proponents suggest that women's attitudes are shaped by and vary with their location in organizational hierarchies (Kanter, 1977). The higher the position, the more "top management" focused the orientation.

Little research has been conducted to test these competing formulations (Riger & Galligan, 1980; Enz & Davis, 1983). The present research was undertaken for this purpose. In an effort to evaluate the viability of these positions, the orientations of women in high, middle and low level corporate jobs were compared. More specifically, "feminine" orientations or orientations considered to be in conflict with the demands of top corporate positions, e.g., low organizational commitment, precedence given to personal rather than career/job demands, attributions for performance guided by external rather than internal forces, greater concern for peer group relationships over task, minimal power aspirations and little sharing of leadership functions were examined as a function of organizational level (Bowman & Worthy, 1965; Trieman & Terrell, 1975; Kanter, 1977; Ayers-Nachamkin, Cann, Reed & Horne, 1982). Person-centered theorists propose that these orientations are held by all working women. Situation-centered proponents argue that only women disadvantageously placed in corporate hierarchies have these attitudes. High powered women, in contrast, have success orientations: high organizational commitment, participative leadership styles, greater concern for jobs than peers, greater weight given

to job/career demands than personal lives, internal rather than external attributions for performance, and high power aspirations (Vroom & Yetton, 1973; Tannenbaum, Karcic, Vianello & Weiser, 1974; Kanter, 1977; Bluedorn, 1983).

In an effort to understand the hypothesized attitudinal differences between women at different organizational levels, questions concerning the nature of their work environments were also pursued, e.g., preference for masculine behavior, organizational concern for one's career growth.

Subjects

260 out of 800 participants at a conference on business completed a survey for employed, corporate women. As men, sole-proprietors and unemployed women also attended the conference, the response rate was at least 33%.

The respondents worked at a vast array of businesses and occupations. 41 were executives or high level managers; 62 were middle level managers; 79 were supervisors or non-management/staff. (The remainder were business owners; their data were not used in this study.) Both white (74%) and minority women (26%) completed the questionnaire.

Measures/Procedure

Three types of question formats were used. On six point scales, subjects indicated the extent to which statements concerning their organization's concern for their growth, inclusion in informal power networks, precedence given to career/job demands over personal lives, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, sharing of leadership functions, and power held and desired, were true (adapted from Smith, Kendall & Hullin, 1969; Kanter, 1977; Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979; Keown & Keown, 1982). On seven-point scales, subjects indicated their level of agreement with statements about men and the work environment. Using a forced choice response format, subjects indicated the most important

aspect of their jobs (salary, personal relationships, work itself, or advancement opportunities) (Kanter, 1977) and the factor which contributes most to their managerial performance (skill and ability, luck, task ease, people working for them, or own hard work) (Feldman-Summers & Kiesler, 1974; Ayers-Nachamkin, Cann, Reed & Horne, 1982). Other measures bearing on the study hypotheses were included, e.g., characteristic decision-making styles, attention given to male vs. female managers, ease of women gaining membership in informal power groups, and will be discussed at the conference.

Results

Situation and person-centered theories make competing predictions with respect to organizational level's effect on women's work orientations. One-way analysis of variance tests in conjunction with the Least Significant Difference means comparison procedure (used to cmpare the means of the hierarchical sub-groups) were performed on the measures to test these predictions.

The following major findings emerged:

- High level corporate women had significantly more organizational commitment ($F(2,181) = 24$, $p < .001$; $t(181) = p < .01$) and power ($F(2,180) = 3.71$, $p < .001$; $t(180) = p < .05$) than middle level women who were, in turn, significantly more powerful ($t(180)$, $p < .01$) and committed ($t(181) = p < .01$) than low level women.
- Lower level women had greater power aspirations than middle level women ($t(178)$, $p < .05$) who in turn had a greater desire to increase their power than high corporate women ($F(2,178) = 8.9$, $p < .001$; $t(178) = p < .05$).
- High and middle level women indicated significantly greater job satisfaction ($F(2,178) = 9.7$, $p < .001$; $t(178) = p < .01$), sharing of

responsibilities ($F(2,142) = 25$; $p < .0001$; $t(142) = p < .01$), organizational concern for career growth ($F(2,176) = 9.2$, $p < .001$; $t(176) = p < .01$), inclusion in informal power network ($F(2,176) = 8.5$, $p < .001$; $t(176) = p < .01$), concern for jobs/career demands over personal lives ($F(2,182) = 11.8$, $p < .001$; $t(182) = p < .01$) (although "highs" tended to have more children ($\chi^2(8) = 15.2$, $p < .06$) than lower level women.

. Middle and lower level women perceived that behaving like a man is significantly more helpful to getting ahead than upper level women ($F(2,181) = 5.9$, $p < .003$; $t(181) = p < .05$).

. Chi square analyses revealed that the majority of women (56%) attributed their performance to their skills and abilities (i.e., an internal factor) ($\chi^2 < 1$) and identified "the type of work" they were doing as the most important aspect of their jobs (45%) ($\chi^2(6) = 11.3$; $p < .08$). No significant differences between the levels emerged.

Other intriguing findings on other measures (e.g., decision-making style, difficulties faced by women in organizations, and differences between minority and white women) will be reported.

Conclusion

The results of the study provided some support for the structuralist position. Higher level women gave greater precedence to their careers, shared more leadership functions, had higher job satisfaction and greater organizational commitment than lower level women. However, inconsistent with this perspective lower level women had greater power aspirations than upper level women. Furthermore, <u>across</u> levels, the majority of women were found to attribute their performance to their skills and abilities and perceived "the type of work" they were doing to be the most important aspect of their jobs. Only high-powered

women were predicted to embrace these orientations.

The person-centered theory, which predicted that all women would hold inappropriate work orientations, was not supported in this study.

The fact that lower level women's work orientations were largely made of the "wrong stuff" may be explained by the greater level of alienation felt by lower level women in their work environments. For example, lower level women reported that they were generally excluded from their organization's formal power network, held a little amount of a resource, i.e., power, they greatly desired, perceived their organizations were relatively unconcerned about their career growth and believed that behaving like a man (although they are women) was helpful to getting ahead. Yet, in other ways, these women appear to be equipped for assuming top corporate positions, e.g., internal performance attributions, greater importance given to task over peer relationships (and the possession of other attitudes not included in this summary). Discriminatory policies and "women's inadequacies" may explain why women are in low level positions despite the fact they have some of the "right stuff."

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